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SUBJECT: FRIED PRESSES PRODI ON AFGHANISTAN, DAL MOLIN BASE  
DECISION

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Classified By: Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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¶1. (S) PM Prodi opened his January 11 a meeting with A/S Fried by questioning the wisdom of the US strike in southern Somalia (he later reiterated this in public). Fried replied that the targets were suspected al-Qaeda terrorists and it must be made clear that Al-Qaeda has no sanctuary anywhere. On Afghanistan, Fried urged Italy (and other allies) to come to the January 26 NATO ministerial in Brussels with concrete proposals for additional civilian and military contributions and to eliminate national caveats. Prodi replied that the GOI would look at what it could do, but caveats were a difficult political issue. On energy, Fried argued the importance of reducing European dependence on Russian gas and oil. The PM readily agreed, but lamented the lack of unity in Europe and poor prospects for turning around the anti-nuclear stance of publics in both Germany and Italy. On the Middle East, Prodi agreed the US and EU must pull together to avoid sending mixed signals to Israel and the Palestinians. At the end of the meeting, Fried and the Ambassador pressed the need for an answer on expansion plans for the 173rd Airborne's facilities at Dal Molin air base. Prodi said there was strong local opposition, and offered a site elsewhere. The Ambassador said it was too late, the proposal had regional and local government agreement, and the USG has spent \$25 million in planning. Congress could take the money away. Prodi said he would make one last effort and provide an answer within a few days. End Summary.

Somalia: To Bomb or Not to Bomb

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¶2. (S) A/S Fried met January 11 at Chigi Palace with Prime Minister Romano Prodi, Defense Minister Arturo Parisi, Prodi senior diplomatic adviser Stefano Sannino, and advisers Marco Carnelos and Sergio Correias. Fried was accompanied by Ambassador and Pol M/C. The meeting occurred shortly after news broke of the US strike in southern Somalia. Fried led off by saying the US and Europe, and the US and Italy, had a rich agenda in coming months -- the President would be addressing Iraq within a few hours, but there was also the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iran/UNSC, Kosovo, and now, Somalia.

¶13. (C) Why the bombing in Somalia now? the PM asked. The consequences are so negative, in terms of impact on public opinion and civilian casualties, that it hardly seems to have been worthwhile. (Earlier, FM D'Alema had publicly called the US bombing of suspected terrorist targets in southern Somalia a "unilateral" action that risked further destabilization. And after the meeting, PM Prodi told a French radio interviewer that "we favor multilateral action" and the USG should "draw better lessons from the Baker Report".) Prodi repeated D'Alema's destabilization line to Fried, saying a multilateral approach was preferable and Ethiopian troops should leave as soon as possible.

¶14. (C) Fried agreed there should be a multilateral approach to Somalia. We too, he said, want Ethiopian troops out, especially out of Mogadishu, and African Union (AU) forces in. A political solution is critical. We're ready to work with Italy on this. We're putting in \$40 million of our own and we hope the EU will be contributing soon as well. But the US action in the south targeted serious terrorists, suspected al-Qaeda members who had been invited in by the Islamic Courts. It must be clear that there can be no sanctuary for al-Qaeda leaders. This was a unique opportunity, in a lawless country. We saw it, took action, and are not sorry we did. It was doubtful that the action would destabilize the situation; in fact, it was supported by the most legitimate authority in the country.

Afghanistan: Need to Pony Up for Job We All Agreed On

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¶15. (C) Fried said we should expect another Taliban offensive this spring, just weeks away. Its aim will be political, to show the Afghan people the Taliban are winning and time is on the Taliban's side. This year, however, the spring offensive

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should be ours -- and not just military. Our European partners, including Italy, have told us that a winning strategy must focus on civil and political as well as military issues. We agree. Following a major policy review on Afghanistan, the US is prepared to contribute substantially more resources of our own. Contrary to the fears of some in Europe, we will not shift US troops from Afghanistan to Iraq, despite increasing commitments there. We need a combined approach -- political/governance, economic, counter-narcotics, working with Pakistan on border areas, but also security. Everyone needs to help.

¶16. (C) We need to demonstrate to the Afghan people this spring that the future is theirs, not the Taliban's. There will be a series of meetings coming up, starting with the NATO ministerial on January 26 in Brussels. NATO and the international community need to build on Riga. We need to be serious and up to the demands of the task we have undertaken.

Success is possible, though it will take work. All the elements the Italian government says it needs -- UN blessing, multilateral solidarity -- are present in Afghanistan. The Afghan government wants our help and enjoys genuine popularity. People do not want the return of the Taliban.

¶17. (C) Prodi acknowledged that Afghanistan was a multilateral issue, but asked whether Fried thought a solution was close. Pakistan did not appear to be very helpful, continued Prodi and asked whether the involvement of neighbors like Russia, China, and Iran might help. It was not helpful for the UK and others to criticize Germany, Italy and Spain (on caveats) at Riga. Prodi did not see a substantial possibility of change for Italy, given its other commitments in the Balkans and Lebanon. This was a political issue, and it would not be easy to increase the number of troops. (MinDef Parisi added that maybe quality could be improved, but not quantity.) Prodi commented that the Russians had deployed many more troops and still could not

control the territory.

¶18. (C) Fried reminded Prodi that the Russians had been occupiers; we were supporting a legitimate Afghan government.

We were, in fact, working closely with Russia on Afghanistan, especially on counter-narcotics and border control in Central Asia. China was less of a factor. Iran knew very well how to help if it decided it didn't want the Taliban to succeed. The USG had been in contact with Iran on Afghanistan in the past. This was winnable. Fried hoped Italy, and others would come to Brussels on January 26 prepared to say what they could do, not what they couldn't. We don't like caveats. We know it is a tough issue politically, but we hope that all countries will take another look at how to eliminate caveats that stand between NATO and success; NATO commanders need to have the tools and flexibility to meet the collective challenge NATO has taken on. The Embassy would be coming back to the GOI soon with some specific suggestions on what was needed from Italy.

Cutting Europe's Russia Energy Habit; Prodi Pro-Nuke

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¶19. (C) Fried pressed the importance of European countries developing and implementing a collective energy strategy to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas. This was a serious problem, and the US and Europe needed to work together on it.

A medium- to long-term strategy was needed. It made no sense to see Russia maintain and extend its control over Caspian resources. Kazakh and Turkmen gas should be able to reach Europe in pipelines not controlled by Russia. We need to change the facts on the ground, i.e. support the TGI and Nabucco pipelines as their commercial viability becomes apparent.

¶10. (C) Prodi agreed that Europe is vulnerable and said the Europeans could be stronger by uniting on the issue. It was a necessity to work with the US, continued Prodi. US-Russian nuclear cooperation had been a good idea. There is no European policy in this area. The Germans were trying to re-examine their anti-nuclear stance, and so was Italy. Prodi said he personally supported nuclear power, but didn't see conditions in Germany or Italy shifting in favor unless there was a crisis, but then, he agreed with Fried, it would be too late. France's civilian nuclear policy had been a

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success. They had been right. Russia was weak in this area, and needed new technology, but only the US and France can provide it. Prodi wondered if it might not be a good idea to form a US-France-Russia triangle on this.

Middle East: US and EU Must Pull Together

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¶11. (C) Fried said the Secretary wanted to advance as far as possible prospects for a Palestinian state, and progress on the Roadmap. To this end, she was headed to the Middle East in the coming days. The U.S. wanted to work closely with the EU and Quartet. Prodi asked about US conditions for promoting a Palestinian unity government. It was hard before, now it's almost impossible. We need a Palestinian government, continued Prodi, so what will the conditions be? Abu Mazen can't deliver. Fried noted that Hamas had given nothing, and pointed out that Abu Mazen had at one point taken the idea of a unity government off the table; we have to respect his conditions, but we also want the Palestinians to understand we're serious about a state and that they need to produce a political leadership we can work with. Prodi smiled and said, "don't underestimate coalition governments!"

He added that the US and EU had to pull in the same direction, or the Israelis and Palestinians will get mixed signals.

Dal Molin

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¶12. (S) Fried then raised Dal Molin airbase in Vicenza and our request for Italian approval of US Army expansion plans there for the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The USG realized there was some opposition, but this was not a new project, it was an expansion of an existing facility. He hoped we could get on with it.

¶13. (S) Prodi said this was not a case of anti-American policy, but local opposition. He wanted cooperation, not transfer of the facility to Germany. What he could offer was a location 30 miles from Aviano, where there would be no overcrowding issue, no local opposition. Other locations were possible, too. He acknowledged part of the difficulty was the "structural weakness" of the government, but noted that local issues could be major concerns even in the US. If there were some flexibility, it could be solved in a fairly short time.

¶14. (S) The Ambassador said we have been in Vicenza for 50 years. We went to the previous government, said we wanted something close to Camp Ederle, and this is what they offered. In addition to the assurances of the last national government, approvals had been obtained from both the regional government and municipality. We've been working on the project for two years and have spent \$25 million on planning. Going somewhere else, like Aviano, loses the benefit of collocation of forces. Since we're so far down the road, at this point we either have expansion at Dal Molin or not at all. We'll take the project to Germany, because the Army wants the two 173rd Airborne groups together.

¶15. (S) This is not a threat, the Ambassador said, it's just a statement of fact. If we do not move forward, Congress could pull the money back in a matter of days. There would be over a billion dollars invested, much of it to local contractors, with annual spending on the local economy likely rising from \$170 million to over \$300 million annually. The head of the local industrialists group had told the Ambassador he was planning to send a message of support to the PM.

¶16. (S) The prime minister, after a long pause, said he would make one last effort and provide the Ambassador with his answer within a few days.

Comment

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¶17. (S) On Afghanistan/NATO, the PM appeared to get the message about the need for the Italian delegation to come to Brussels with new ideas, but didn't appear to have any right

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at hand. Still, Embassy thinks he took on board Fried's presentation on the need to re-examine the combined Italian civil and military commitment, including on caveats, and they will likely try to come up with some kind of improved package for the Brussels ministerial.

¶18. (S) The harder part of this meeting for the PM was Dal Molin. The project is strenuously opposed by far left members of his governing coalition, whose support he needs to keep his government viable in Parliament. He doesn't want to say no to them, and he doesn't want to say no to us. It is likely that FM D'Alema is the only one, as head of the largest coalition party, who has the political firepower to take on the far left over this issue. The two will no doubt confer on next steps. One strange note was the departure of the Minister of Defense from the meeting, just before the discussion on Dal Molin began. Although Prodi sent an aide after him, he did not return for the discussion.

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